United Nations

Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ United Nations begins repatriation of some 375,000 Cambodian refugees from Thailand; officials of United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia take part in ceremony for release of 31 prisoners of war and civilian internees.

+ Joseph Verner Reed appointed to coordinate United Nations efforts on consequences of oil well fires in Kuwait; delivers message to Kuwaiti Emir.

+ Under-Secretary-General for Public Information says awareness must be instilled that "United Nations is good value for the dollar" -- a cost-effective and humane solution to conflict and human suffering.

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The United Nations repatriation programme for some 375,000 Cambodian refugees began today in Cambodia. The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Cambodia, Yasushi Akashi, and President of the Supreme National Council, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, today greeted the first returnees arriving from Thailand at an official reception centre near the town of Sisophon.

According to a United Nations spokesman in Cambodia, the first convoy of buses and trucks carrying the refugees travelled down a route which had been upgraded and de-mined by the Royal Thai Army. After spending some days at the centre, the refugees will move on to four village settlements near the town of Sisophon. United Nations officials hope that during April, two to three convoys a week carrying between 8,500 and 10,000 refugees will leave Thailand.

The repatriation of Cambodian refugees is an essential step in the implementation of United Nations settlement plan for Cambodia. The programme is expected to be completed within a nine-month period.

Meanwhile, 31 prisoners of war and civilian detainees were released yesterday, 29 March, by the State of Cambodia in a ceremony presided over by Prince Sihanouk, with the participation of Mr. Akashi.

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A spokesman for the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) has reported that so far, some 642 prisoners of war and civilian detainees have been released by the State under the direction of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Special Representative.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has asked Joseph Verner Reed, his Special Representative for Public Affairs, to take over the duties of Margaret Joan Anstee as Special Representative to coordinate United Nations efforts to counter the consequences of oil well fires in Kuwait and the Gulf region. An announcement to this effect was made today by a spokesman for the Secretary-General.

Early last month, Ms. Anstee was been appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Angola.

In the fulfilment of his new mission, Mr. Reed left for Kuwait over the weekend and is scheduled to meet today with the Emir of Kuwait, to whom he will deliver a message from the Secretary-General.

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The Committee on Information began its annual session today, hearing an introductory statement by the new United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, Eugeniusz Wyzner, who indicated how the present quest of peoples for knowledge about the United Nations might influence the design and direction of global events into the next century.

Mr. Wyzner said "we must do our best to reach into every town and village, almost to every household, to earn the trust and support so central to the formation of public consent -- the cornerstone of an effective United Nations". The awareness must be enstilled, he went on, that "the United Nations is good value for the dollar" -- a cost-effective and humane solution to conflict and human suffering.

The Under-Secretary-General noted that the Department of Public Information (DPI), which had recently undergone a major restructuring, would retain its current organizational form at present. However, the Department had been mandated by the Secretary-General to work with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on integrating a number of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices. The Secretary-General had also decided to establish United Nations interim offices in some republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States, integrating development and information activities.

Mr Wyzner went on to say that the sharp increase in the number and scope of peace-making and peace-keeping activities had made new demands on DPI in formulating and implementing information programmes tailored to each endeavour. Information components such as educational campaigns on human rights had been designed for the United Nations Observer Mission in El

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Salvador (ONUSAL) and the United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), among others.

With regard to the upcoming United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Mr. Wyzner said DPI was already handling some 40 to 50 press quiries each day, and some 1,635 journalists had been accrediteu to the Conference thus far.

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CORRECTION: A story in Friday Highlights of 27 March misstated the nationality Max van der Stoel, Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights situation in Iraq, who is from the Netherlands, rather than Belgium.